United Nations

Press Release

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TUESDAY HIGHLIGHTS

- Secretary-General meets with Heads of State of Morocco, Algeria; arrives in Lisbon to witness signing of Angola accords, which he calls "a great success of Portuguese diplomacy".

- Secretary-General appeals to all sides in Ethiopian conflict to observe cease-fire; says United Nations system will intensify humanitarian assistance.

- Secretary-General asks former Under-Secretary-General to lead expert team on exploratory mission to investigate reconstruction of Iran as result of damage resulting from Iran-Iraq conflict.

- ILO Director-General says market economy in Eastern Europe should not sacrifice social protection.

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Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar arrived in Lisbon yesterday after having spent the weekend in Morocco and Algeria where he met with King Hassan II of Morocco and with President Chadli Bendjedid of Algeria.

In Rabat on Saturday, 25 May, he had a meeting with the King of Morocco during which they exchanged views on a number of international issues, in particular the United Nations operation in Western Sahara, the Middle East question and the aftermath of the Persian Gulf crisis, including the United Nations' role in northern Iraq.

On Sunday, 26 May, before leaving Rabat, the Secretary-General spoke to the press at the airport. In answer to a question regarding the date of the cease-fire in Western Sahara, he said he had sent messages to both parties before leaving New York asking them to suggest a time-frame for the cease-fire. "I think", he said, "that it will occur very soon", adding, when pressed, that he hoped it would happen in June.

(more)

For information media—not an official record

Regarding the budget of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO), the Secretary-General was asked why the operation had initially been estimated at $300 million and subsequently reduced to $180 million. The Secretary-General pointed out that the United Nations was being asked to undertake numerous missions, for example, in Angola, Central America and Cambodia, and that the major donors were pressing the Organization to cut costs.

Keeping in mind the importance of not jeopardizing the credibility of the operation, the Secretary-General said the United Nations had asked for contributions in kind as well as in cash, particularly with regard to logistical and communications equipment. Asked whether he was optimistic, the Secretary-General said he was hopeful and that his goal was to hold the referendum by the end of the year, possibly by the end of November.

The Secretary-General left Rabat on Sunday for the city of Oran, in western Algeria, where he met with the President of Algeria, Mr. Bendjedid. They discussed various international problems of mutual concern, particularly the question of the Near and Middle East. They also reviewed the question of Western Sahara.

Yesterday, 27 May, the Secretary-General went to Lisbon where he is scheduled to witness the signing of the agreement between the Government of Angola and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA).

Upon his arrival at the airport in Lisbon the Secretary-General told the press that he considered the Angola accords "a great success of Portuguese diplomacy". Asked about the future role of the United Nations in Angola, the Secretary-General said the United Nations would strengthen the existing United Nations Angola Verification Mission (UNAVEM) force. However, he said, the Security Council still had to approve any increase in the force's activities, as well as give the green light for the budget.

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Secretary-General Perez de Cuellar has expressed concern over the unfolding events in Ethiopia.

In a statement issued at Headquarters over the weekend, he appealed to all sides to observe an immediate cease-fire in order to enhance the chances of success of a negotiated settlement.

In the meantime, the statement said, the United Nations system would intensify its humanitarian assistance programme with a view to meeting the needs of the people of Ethiopia. The Secretary-General called on all the parties to cooperate with the United Nations in order to facilitate such assistance.

(more)

In a related development, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) said today that it was stepping up its operational capacity in Ethiopia, following the recent developments in the country, in order to assist victims of the conflict.

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The Secretary-General has asked former Under-Secretary-General Abdulrahim A. Farah to lead a team of experts who will make an exploratory visit to Iran towards the end of May.

The request is made in response to the mandate entrusted to the Secretary-General by Security Council resolution 598 (1987) by which the Council "recognizes the magnitude of the damage inflicted during the conflict between Iran and Iraq and the need for reconstruction efforts, with appropriate international assistance, once the conflict is ended, and in this regard, requests the Secretary-General to assign a team of experts to study the question and to report back to the Council".

In a letter to the President of the Security Council, dated 23 May, the Secretary-General said it was anticipated that the team would remain in the area for an initial period of two to three weeks.

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The Director-General of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), Michel Hansenne, said yesterday that the transition to a market-oriented economy in Central and Eastern Europe should be rapid but without sacrificing social protection and representative workers' and employers' institutions.

The Director-General was addressing the opening of an ILO/Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) meeting on labour markets, social policy and industrial relations in Eastern Europe.

He said mass unemployment appeared imminent following structural adjustment. That gave added urgency to the development of remedial and preventive measures, and to implementing active labour market policies. He warned that after this July, millions of workers in the Soviet Union were likely to become unemployed. The ILO, he said, was keen to help the transition by promoting democratic institutions, the development of collective bargaining and the pursuit of social consensus.

The two-day meeting at the ILO offices in Geneva is being attended by senior labour economists and other experts from Central and Eastern Europe.

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